

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

16-10

January 4, 2016

Dear Chairman Wheeler,

As the Commission finalizes its consideration of reforms to the rate-of-return mechanism, we ask that the Commission take this opportunity to carefully consider including a tribal broadband factor. This factor could provide specific, targeted funding to address the lack of broadband service and telecommunications infrastructure on tribal lands. Inclusion of the tribal broadband factor would be a strong step in addressing what you so aptly described as a “persistent deficit of achievement” when it comes to adopting policies to promote greater access to telecommunications services on tribal lands.

Too many Americans continue to live on the wrong side of the digital divide. According to the Commission’s 2015 Broadband Progress Report, more than half of those living in rural areas lack fixed broadband access. By comparison 8 percent of Americans living in urban areas, and 17 percent of the U.S. population as a whole, lack broadband access.

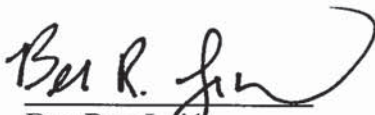
The broadband challenge for those living on tribal lands is even more dire. The broadband deployment rate on tribal lands is just 37 percent. These areas face many unique obstacles to deployment including the need to respect culturally sensitive historic lands, coordinate with Bureau of Indian Affairs, and address Tribal rights-of-ways. With the added challenges of sparsely populated lands and many potential customers being of lower income, tribal lands are often the most economically challenging to serve. This makes them the very areas that the Universal Service Fund should target. We believe the Commission has a unique opportunity to address this disparity and ensure that those living on tribal lands are not left unconnected as they were with the deployment of telephone service.

We urge the Commission to consider providing targeted support that would ensure that rate-of-return carriers serving tribal lands have an opportunity to receive sufficient support to extend the reach of broadband networks into the tribal lands they serve. Additional support could be made fiscally responsible by limiting it to geographic areas with tribal lands, use only to promote the deployment of broadband, and include performance benchmarks. In short, this type of tribal fund would meet certain key criteria that make it worthy of consideration: it would be targeted to meet a clear need, it would be specific in its goal and duration, and it would hold recipients of the additional funding accountable with demonstrable results to meeting clear policy objectives.


We hope the Commission will seriously consider including a tribal broadband factor as it works on Universal Service Fund. Moreover, we urge the Commission to work with tribal leaders and the carriers serving tribal lands to make certain they have the necessary resources to bring broadband to these communities. We agree with the sentiment that you recently expressed that the USF reform effort is a “once-in-a-generation opportunity” and failure to seize this opportunity to ensure the ubiquity of broadband will be a failure “to make a real difference for the future of our communities, our neighbors, and our country.”


Thank you for your consideration.

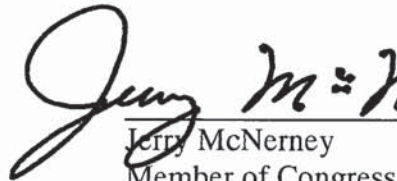
Sincerely,


Ben Ray Lujan
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress


Tom J. Cole
Member of Congress


Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress


Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress


Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress


Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress

Cc: Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel
Commissioner Ajit Pai
Commissioner Michael O'Rielly



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Frank Pallone
U.S. House of Representatives
237 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Pallone:

Thank you for your letter urging the Commission to consider a proposal for targeted investments in broadband infrastructure on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

I wholeheartedly agree with your view that access to broadband technology is critical for Tribal communities to participate fully in today's economy. I personally have seen the lack of communications services and infrastructure across Indian Country. The lack of services and infrastructure reinforces a history of isolation that has limited economic and educational opportunities. That is why expanding high-speed broadband connections to all corners of the country is a top priority for the Commission. Nowhere could meeting this objective be more impactful than on Tribal lands.

On February 12, I circulated an Order to modernize universal support for rate-of-return carriers. The proposed Order sets forth a package of reforms to address rate-of-return issues that are fundamentally intertwined—the need to modernize the program to provide support for stand-alone broadband service; the need to improve incentives for broadband investment to connect unserved rural Americans; and the need to strengthen the rate-of-return system to provide certainty and stability for years to come. A Further Notice included with the Order would specifically seek comment on additional reforms, including the Tribal Broadband Factor proposal you reference in your letter, to further incentivize broadband investment and deployment on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. Once we have a full record, I intend to take action before the end of the year to further promote broadband deployment on tribal lands.

I recognize that the challenges before us are great. But working together, we will seize upon technological opportunities to improve lives across Indian Country. I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Tony Cárdenas
U.S. House of Representatives
1510 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Cárdenas:

Thank you for your letter urging the Commission to consider a proposal for targeted investments in broadband infrastructure on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

I wholeheartedly agree with your view that access to broadband technology is critical for Tribal communities to participate fully in today's economy. I personally have seen the lack of communications services and infrastructure across Indian Country. The lack of services and infrastructure reinforces a history of isolation that has limited economic and educational opportunities. That is why expanding high-speed broadband connections to all corners of the country is a top priority for the Commission. Nowhere could meeting this objective be more impactful than on Tribal lands.

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Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Tom Cole
U.S. House of Representatives
2467 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Cole:

Thank you for your letter urging the Commission to consider a proposal for targeted investments in broadband infrastructure on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

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Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Suzan DelBene
U.S. House of Representatives
318 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman DelBene:

Thank you for your letter urging the Commission to consider a proposal for targeted investments in broadband infrastructure on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

I wholeheartedly agree with your view that access to broadband technology is critical for Tribal communities to participate fully in today's economy. I personally have seen the lack of communications services and infrastructure across Indian Country. The lack of services and infrastructure reinforces a history of isolation that has limited economic and educational opportunities. That is why expanding high-speed broadband connections to all corners of the country is a top priority for the Commission. Nowhere could meeting this objective be more impactful than on Tribal lands.

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OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Anna G. Eshoo
U.S. House of Representatives
241 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Eshoo:

Thank you for your letter urging the Commission to consider a proposal for targeted investments in broadband infrastructure on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

I wholeheartedly agree with your view that access to broadband technology is critical for Tribal communities to participate fully in today's economy. I personally have seen the lack of communications services and infrastructure across Indian Country. The lack of services and infrastructure reinforces a history of isolation that has limited economic and educational opportunities. That is why expanding high-speed broadband connections to all corners of the country is a top priority for the Commission. Nowhere could meeting this objective be more impactful than on Tribal lands.

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WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Derek Kilmer
U.S. House of Representatives
1520 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Kilmer:

Thank you for your letter urging the Commission to consider a proposal for targeted investments in broadband infrastructure on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

I wholeheartedly agree with your view that access to broadband technology is critical for Tribal communities to participate fully in today's economy. I personally have seen the lack of communications services and infrastructure across Indian Country. The lack of services and infrastructure reinforces a history of isolation that has limited economic and educational opportunities. That is why expanding high-speed broadband connections to all corners of the country is a top priority for the Commission. Nowhere could meeting this objective be more impactful than on Tribal lands.

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OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Ben Ray Luján
U.S. House of Representatives
2446 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Luján:

Thank you for your letter urging the Commission to consider a proposal for targeted investments in broadband infrastructure on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

I wholeheartedly agree with your view that access to broadband technology is critical for Tribal communities to participate fully in today's economy. I personally have seen the lack of communications services and infrastructure across Indian Country. The lack of services and infrastructure reinforces a history of isolation that has limited economic and educational opportunities. That is why expanding high-speed broadband connections to all corners of the country is a top priority for the Commission. Nowhere could meeting this objective be more impactful than on Tribal lands.

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OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Jerry McNerney
U.S. House of Representatives
2265 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman McNerney:

Thank you for your letter urging the Commission to consider a proposal for targeted investments in broadband infrastructure on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

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